

## THE MAHAYANA PATH OF PREPARATION

The following presentation is according to Panchen Sonam Drakpa's *General Meaning* which is a commentary on Gyaltsab je's *Ornament of the Essence*. The *Ornament of the Essence*, in turn, is a commentary on *Clarifying the Meaning*, a short and precise text composed by the eighth century Master Haribhadra and, as mentioned before, considered to be one of the best Indian commentaries on Maitreya's *Ornament*.

However, only some of the passages presented below are literal translations of the *General Meaning*'s exposition on the Mahayana path of preparation, while the remainders are modified and interspersed with additional explanations.

Panchen Sonam Drakpa starts his exposition by citing a conjunctive or introductory passage (Tib.: *mtshams shyor*) that explains why the presentation of the ten types of practice instruction is followed by the presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation:

Having set forth the ten types of Mahayana practice instructions next follows a detailed presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation (the second of the five Mahayana paths).

The reason for presenting the Mahayana path of preparation after having set forth the ten practice instructions is that on the Mahayana path of accumulation practitioners come to a true understanding of emptiness (the lack of intrinsic existence of phenomena) with 'an awareness arisen from hearing' and 'an awareness arisen from contemplation' by relying on the ten practice instructions. 'An awareness arisen from hearing' refers to a correctly assuming consciousness and 'an awareness arisen from contemplation' to an inferential cognizer. A correctly assuming consciousness apprehending emptiness correctly perceives emptiness but does not realize it, while an inferential cognizer apprehending emptiness not only apprehends emptiness correctly but also realizes it.

Hence Bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation first cultivate a correctly assuming consciousness apprehending emptiness and thereafter an inferential cognizer realizing emptiness. Both awarenesses are cultivated in reliance on the ten practice instructions.

As a result of these two awarenesses they then cultivate the Mahayana path of preparation that is 'an awareness mainly arisen from meditation' realizing emptiness. 'An awareness mainly arisen from meditation' refers to a *meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight*.

The attainment of the first moment of a meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight, realizing emptiness marks the first moment of the Mahayana path of preparation. (This explanation is from the point of view of Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path from the outset and who did not realize emptiness directly while abiding on the Hinayana path.)

Therefore, since the Mahayana path of accumulation apprehending emptiness is the cause of the Mahayana path of preparation realizing emptiness and since the Mahayana path of accumulation realizing emptiness is generated in reliance on the ten practice instructions the Mahayana path of preparation realizing emptiness is also generated in reliance on the ten practice instructions.

Haribhadra says in his *Clarifying the Meaning*:

Beginners have thus obtained the [Mahayana] practice instructions. Since the elements of definite differentiation (i.e. the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation) come forth, the elements of definite differentiation [will be explained].

Gyaltsab je says in his *Ornament of the Essence*:

Beginners abiding on the [Mahayana] path of accumulation, owing to having thus obtained the [Mahayana] practice instructions, meditate on the meaning of the practice instructions so that the elements of definite differentiation (i.e. the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation) come forth. Therefore, subsequent to [the Mahayana practice instructions] the elements of definite differentiation - the path that is a similitude of generating the path of seeing - will be explained.

After Panchen Sonam Drakpa gives the reason for the presentation of the Mahayana practice instructions being followed by the presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation he cites the following sutric passages which teach the Mahayana path of preparation:

*A Bodhisattva, a great heroic being, having not lapsed into the fault of the Bodhisattva's peak level and seeking to fully perfect all such root virtues, trains in the perfection of wisdom.*

(and:)

*Then the Venerable Shariputra asks the Venerable Subhuti, "Venerable Subhuti, how does one lapse into the fault of the peak of a Bodhisattva, a great heroic being?" Venerable Subhuti replies by saying to the Venerable Shariputra, "Venerable Shariputra, a Bodhisattva, a great heroic being who is not skillful practices the six perfections. Not knowing how to be skillful he relies on the meditative stabilizations of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, and even though he does not fall onto the level of Hearers and Solitary Realizers he does not engage in not having the fault of a Bodhisattva. Such is the fault of the peak of a Bodhisattva, a great heroic being."*

(and:)

*Shariputra says, "Venerable Subhuti, why does one incur the fault of a Bodhisattva, a great heroic being?" Subhuti says, "Venerable Shariputra, when a Bodhisattva, a great heroic being, practices the six perfections, he strongly adheres to [the true existence] of the impermanence of sound, fully abides, knows all...*

and so forth.

Here the title 'Venerable' is a translation of the Tibetan term *tshe dang ldan pa* which literally means 'possessing life'. This is the title that is used to address junior monastics and according to Geshe Palden Drakpa (a great master from Drepung Loseling Monastery) means "possessing a meaningful life". 'Not having the fault of a Bodhisattva' (Tib.: *byang chub sems pa'i skyon med pa*) refers to a Bodhisattva realizing emptiness directly. Hence, the fault of the peak of a Bodhisattva refers to a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation who owing to strong grasping onto true existence is unable to realize emptiness directly and thus to proceed to the path of seeing.

The citation of the sutric passages is followed by Panchen Sonam Drakpa quoting the first line of the first two verses of the **Ornament**:

*Just as the focus and the aspect...*

and so forth.

These two verses set forth the Mahayana path of preparation by way of briefly presenting the five characteristics of (1) *focus*, (2) *aspect*, (3) *cause*, (4) *tutor*, and (5) *mode of association* by which the Mahayana path of preparation is superior to the Hinayana path of preparation. According to another interpretation, the two verses present a further sixth characteristic by which the Mahayana path of preparation is superior to the Hinayana path of preparation: the characteristic of the (6) *division*.

Thereafter, Panchen Sonam Drakpa quotes the first line of the next ten verses of the **Ornament**:

*The focus, impermanent, and so on,*

and so forth. These ten verses set forth the Mahayana path of preparation by way of providing extensive descriptions of the above mentioned five or six characteristics.

The twelve verses together with their meaning will be presented below.

The **General Meaning** elucidates the Mahayana path of preparation by way of six subtopics:

1. The support (of the Mahayana path of preparation)
2. The nature (of the Mahayana path of preparation)
3. The categories (of the Mahayana path of preparation)
4. The process of generating (the Mahayana path of preparation)
5. The meaning of each category (of the Mahayana path of preparation)
6. The type of awareness (that constitutes the Mahayana path of preparation that is a union of calm abiding and special insight realizing emptiness)

But before setting forth the six subtopics, the following explanation may help to develop a general understanding of the Mahayana path of preparation and its four levels:

Etymologically, the path of preparation (Tib.: *sbyor lam*) is a path that serves as a *preparation* for the path of seeing, i.e. for the meditative equipoise *directly* realizing emptiness.

The Mahayana path of preparation consists of four levels, which are attained successively:

- 1) Heat
- 2) Peak
- 3) Forbearance
- 4) Supreme Dharma

As mentioned above, the first moment of 'the meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight, *conceptually* realizing emptiness' in the continuum of a Bodhisattva marks the first moment of the Mahayana path of preparation.

Such a union is an awareness that, unlike the inferential cognizer conceptually realizing emptiness, is free from mental distraction and mental sinking. It is a deep, clear, and intense perception, which has overcome *coarse* dualistic appearances. Furthermore, with each of the four levels (heat, peak, etc.) dualistic appearances become increasingly subtle.

Nonetheless, the path of preparation's clear appearance of emptiness is not the same as the clear appearance of emptiness of the path of seeing, since on the path of seeing emptiness is realized directly and non-dualistically, whereas on the path of preparation it is realized by means of a generic image of emptiness.

### 1) **Heat**

Tibetan: *drod* (= heat, warmth)

The first moment of the **heat** period of the Mahayana path of preparation and the first moment of the Mahayana path of preparation are equivalent.

Regarding the etymology of this level of the path of preparation, the meditative equipoise *directly* realizing emptiness (which is newly attained on the path of seeing) is described as a fire that *burns* or eliminates obstructions. Therefore, when Bodhisattvas reach the 'meditative stabilization, which is a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' they are getting closer to the direct realization of emptiness, which is why the heat level is a sign that practitioners are approaching the fire of the meditative equipoise of the path of seeing.

### 2) **Peak**

Tibetan: *rtse mo* (= peak/summit/foremost)

Etymologically, this level of the path of preparation is called 'peak' because it exceeds and is superior to the heat level.

### 3) **Forbearance**

Tibetan: *bzod pa* (= forbearance/endurance/patience)

Regarding the etymology, during this level Bodhisattvas achieve a type of forbearance or endurance that is free from the fear of emptiness.

Also, from the forbearance path of preparation onwards, Bodhisattvas can no longer be reborn in the lower realms (hell-realm, preta realm, and animal realm) through the force of afflictions and contaminated karma – even though once they reach the path of seeing they may still choose to be reborn in those realms in order to benefit sentient beings.

### 4) **Supreme Dharma**

Tibetan: *chos mchog* (*chos* = Dharma/phenomenon, *mchog* = supreme/utmost/highest)

Etymologically, this level is called supreme Dharma because it is supreme among *mundane* virtues. It is supreme among mundane virtues since it is the highest level of the two mundane paths. The two mundane paths are the path of accumulation and the path of preparation.

The path of accumulation and the path of preparation are mundane paths because Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path from the outset do not *directly* realize emptiness on those two paths. The

attainment of the mind that *directly* realizes emptiness (i.e. the attainment of the path of seeing) marks the first moment of the supermundane or Arya path and of becoming an Arya. From this point onwards, Bodhisattvas will no longer be reborn uncontrollably through the power of afflictions and contaminated karma, but deliberately through the power of compassion and prayer, in order to benefit sentient beings.

Hence the former two paths are mundane paths and the latter three Arya or supermundane paths.

Mundane paths		Arya paths / Supermundane paths		
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Path of accumulation	Path of preparation	Path of seeing	Path of meditation	Path of no-more-learning

The four levels of the path of preparation (heat, peak, forbearance, and supreme Dharma) are the same in conceptually realizing the lack of true existence and in having clear appearance of emptiness. Yet they are not the same regarding the length of time during which the practitioners have familiarized with emptiness. As a result, they also differ with regard to the type of misperception they are able to undermine or weaken. This is explained below.

### 1. The support (of the Mahayana path of preparation)

Returning to the six subtopics presented in the *General Meaning*, the first of the subtopics, the support, is categorized into two:

- i. The physical support
- ii. The mental support

#### i. The physical support

The physical support of the Mahayana path of preparation refers to the rebirth in one of the realms a practitioner must abide in to be able to *newly* cultivate each of the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation.

According to Vasubhandu's *Abhidharma-kosha* (which is from the point of view of the Vaibashika and Sautantrika philosophical tenet systems), the physical support of practitioners who newly attain the heat, peak, or forbearance level of the Mahayana path of preparation is one of the three human states of existence. In general, there are four human states of existence:

1. Humans of the Eastern Continent called 'the Continent of [Those With] Superior/Large Bodies (Skt.: *purvavideha*, Tib.: *shar lus 'phags po*),
2. Humans of the Southern Continent called 'the Continent of the Rose-Apple or *Jambu* Fruit' (Skt.: *jambudvīpa*, Tib.: *lho 'dzam bu gling*)
3. Humans of the Western Continent called 'the Continent of Using Cattle' (Skt.: *aparagodaniya*, Tib.: *nub ba blang spyod*)
4. Humans of the Northern Continent called 'the Continent of Unpleasant Sound' (Skt.: *uttarakuru*, Tib.: *byang sgra mi snyan*)

Here the three human states of existence which are the physical support of practitioners who newly attain the heat, peak, or forbearance level of the Mahayana path of preparation refer to humans of the Eastern, Southern, or Western Continent. Please note that humans of the Southern continent refer to humans born on planet Earth. Therefore, according to the *Abhidharma-kosha*, a Bodhisattva who newly attains the heat, peak, or forbearance level of the path of preparation is necessarily a human being of one of the three levels.

However, there are no Bodhisattvas who newly attain one of the first three levels of the path of preparation as humans of the Northern Continent. The reason for this is that humans of the Northern Continent have great karmic distractions which prevent them from generating the degree of renunciation that is necessary to cultivate any of the three levels.

Bodhisattvas who newly attain the fourth level of supreme Dharma of the path of preparation are either human beings of one of the three human states of existence or celestial beings of the Desire Realm. Why citing the *Abhidharma kosha*?

From the point of view of the Mahayana tenet schools (Chittamatra and Madhyamika tenet systems), Bodhisattvas who newly attain the heat, peak, or forbearance level of the Mahayana path of preparation are humans of one of the three continents, celestial beings of the Desire Realm, or celestial beings of the Form Realm. Whereas Bodhisattvas who newly attain the supreme Dharma level of the path of preparation are only either humans of the three continents or celestial beings of the Desire Realm. There are no celestial beings of the Form Realm who newly attain the supreme Dharma level of the path of preparation because there are no celestial beings of the Form Realm who newly attain the Mahayana path of seeing, and because the physical support of the two, the supreme Dharma level of the Mahayana path of preparation and the Mahayana path of seeing is the same. The physical support of the two, the supreme Dharma level of the Mahayana path of preparation and the Mahayana path of seeing is the same, for Vasubhandu says in the *Treasury of Knowledge* (Skt.: *Abhidharma-kosha*, Tib.: *mngon pa mdzod*)

*That [the supreme Dharma level] is the same level as the path of seeing*

Gyaltsab je says in his *Ornament of the Essence*:

Men and women of the three [human] continents as well as celestial beings of the Desire Realm constitute the physical support [for generating the Mahayana path of preparation]. Even though [beings of the Form Realm are] not the physical support for directly generating the supreme Dharma level, apparently some beings of the Form Realm [newly] generate the heat and peak levels.

## ii. *The mental support*

The mental support here refers to the type of meditative absorption with which practitioners newly attain each of the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation. Of the eight absorptions (i.e. the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions) Bodhisattvas newly attain each of the four levels of the path of preparation with one of the four concentrations.

## 2. *The nature (of the Mahayana path of preparation)*

In general, the 'nature' (Tib.: *ngo bo*) of a phenomenon refers to its meaning or possibly its definition. However, citing the nature of something in the *General Meaning* is often intended to provide students merely with a general idea of the phenomenon it delineates and not with a definition that withstands logical analysis. Definitions that withstand logical analysis are provided in Panchen Sonam Drakpa's *Decisive Analysis* (although here the nature of the Mahayana path of preparation can also serve as its definition).

The nature of the Mahayana path of preparation is:

A mundane Mahayana path that arises subsequent to the completion of its cause, the path of concordance of liberation (i.e. the path of accumulation), and that is a similitude of the 'truth clear realization'.

The meaning of the different aspects of the nature is:

- ❖ **A mundane Mahayana path:** It is a Mahayana path because it is a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva. It is a mundane Mahayana path because it is a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who has not yet reached the path of seeing.
- ❖ **It arises subsequent to the completion of its cause, the path of concordance of liberation:** The 'path of concordance of liberation' (Tib.: *thar pa cha mthun*) is another name for the path of accumulation. Therefore, the path of partial concordance of liberation and the path of accumulation are equivalent. The Mahayana path of preparation arises subsequent to the completion of its cause, the path of partial concordance of liberation (i.e. the path of accumulation), because it cannot arise before the path of concordance of liberation is completed and because it is produced by the path of partial concordance of liberation (i.e. the path of accumulation), and is thus generated subsequent to it.

- ❖ **It is a similitude of the 'truth clear realization':** The 'truth clear realization' is another name for the path of seeing. Hence, the 'truth of clear realization' and the path of seeing are equivalent. The Mahayana path of preparation is similar to the path of seeing, for instance, with regard to its realization of emptiness, for even though it does not realize emptiness directly but it does so with a meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight. Therefore, it is a similitude of the path of seeing, i.e. the 'truth of realization'.

Please note that whatever is a Mahayana path of preparation is not necessarily an awareness arisen from meditation because there are also Mahayana paths of preparation that are awarenesses arisen from hearing and awarenesses arisen from contemplation.

Asanga says in his *Summary of Manifest Knowledge* (Skt. *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, Tib.: *mngon pa kun btus*):

*Whatever exists on the [path of] accumulation also exists on the [path of] preparation*

Vasubhandu says in his commentary on *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata* (Skt.: *Dharma Dharmata Vibhanga*, Tib.: *chos nyid rnam 'byed kyi 'brel ba*):

*All are thoroughly distinguished by [awarenesses arisen from] hearing, contemplation, and meditation*

Gyaltsab je says in the *Ornament of the Essence*:

[The nature of the Mahayana path of preparation is:] a mundane Mahayana path [that arises] subsequent to the completion of a concordance of liberation, and that is a similitude of the direct realization of the truth. [The Mahayana path of preparation] is not limited to solely being wisdoms arisen from meditation, because there are many cases of [Mahayana paths of preparation that are] wisdoms arisen from hearing or contemplation.

### 3. The categories (of the Mahayana path of preparation)

As mentioned above, the Mahayana path of preparation can be categorized into:

- 1) The heat level of the path of preparation
- 2) The peak level of the path of preparation
- 3) The forbearance level of the path of preparation
- 4) The supreme Dharma level of the path of preparation

This fourfold division is from the point of view of the nature of the Mahayana path of preparation.

Each of the four levels can be further categorized into:

- a) Small
- b) Middling
- c) Great

Hence, there is a small, middling, and great **heat** level of the Mahayana path of preparation, a small, middling, and great **peak** level of the Mahayana path of preparation, and so forth - in total twelve levels.

The threefold subdivision can be interpreted in two ways. Small, middling, and great may refer to practitioners of different mental faculties, with *small heat* referring to Bodhisattvas on the **heat** level of the path of preparation who are of weak mental faculty, *middling heat* to those of middling faculty, and *great heat* to those of sharp faculty. Similarly, *small peak* refers to Bodhisattvas on the **peak** level of the path of preparation who are of weak mental faculty, *middling peak* to those of middling mental faculty, and so forth.

Another possibility is that small, middling, and great refer to the time when they were generated, with *small heat* referring to the level generated in the beginning of the **heat** level, *middling heat* to the level generated in the middle, and *great heat* referring to the level generated at the end.

Panchen Sonam Drakpa asserts only the latter interpretation to be correct. The latter interpretation also corresponds to the scriptures describing this subdivision as being 'a category from the point of view of temporary states'.

Gyalsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

The category [from the point of view of] temporary states are the three: small, middling, and great.  
The category [from the point of view] of nature are the four: heat, and so forth.

#### **4. The mode of generating (the Mahayana path of preparation)**

As mentioned before, the first moment of the Mahayana path of preparation is attained when Bodhisattvas newly generate 'an awareness mainly arisen from meditation' conceptually realizing emptiness. In other words, they attain the first moment of the Mahayana path of preparation when they newly generate the first moment of the meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight conceptually realizing emptiness.

However, 'awarenesses mainly arisen from meditation' also arise in the continuums of Bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation; they arise in both, the continuums of Bodhisattvas who prior to entering the Mahayana path entered the Hinayana path and became Hinayana Arhats, and in the continuums of Bodhisattvas who prior to entering the Mahayana path did *not* enter the Hinayana path (i.e. Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path from the outset). Yet in the case of Bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation who entered the Mahayana path from the outset, 'awarenesses mainly arisen from meditation' take to mind only *conventional truths*. Examples of such awarenesses are meditative stabilizations that are a union of calm abiding and special insight perceiving the suffering nature of the contaminated aggregates, impermanence, unpleasantness, and so forth. The meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight apprehending emptiness (i.e. the ultimate truth) does not manifest in their continuums.

Gyalsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

Although on the path of accumulation a fully qualified training in complete aspects that thoroughly practices the aspects of the three knowers, a wisdom arisen from meditation that focuses on impermanence and suffering, and a wisdom arisen from meditation that meditates on unpleasantness, and so forth manifest, a wisdom [mainly] arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness does not manifest because when that [wisdom mainly arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness] is for the first time generated [Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path from the outset] progress to the path of preparation.

Please note that there are three types of awareness:

- (a) An awareness arisen from hearing (Tib.: *thos byung gi blo*)
- (b) An awareness arisen from contemplation (Tib.: *bsam byung gi blo*)
- (c) An awareness arisen from meditation (Tib.: *bsgoms byung gi blo*)

'An awareness arisen from hearing' refers to a correctly assuming consciousness, 'an awareness arisen from contemplation' to an inferential cognizer, and 'an awareness arisen from meditation' to either an awareness that is concomitant with the mental factor of calm abiding or to the mental factor of calm abiding itself.

Similarly, there are three types of wisdom:

- (a) A wisdom arisen from hearing (Tib.: *thos byung gi shes rab*)
- (b) A wisdom arisen from contemplation (Tib.: *bsam byung gi shes rab*)
- (c) A wisdom arisen from meditation (Tib.: *bsgoms byung gi shes rab*)

'A wisdom arisen from hearing' refers to the mental factor of wisdom that is a correctly assuming consciousness, 'a wisdom arisen from contemplation' to the mental factor of wisdom that is an inferential cognizer, and 'a wisdom arisen from meditation' to the mental factor of wisdom that is concomitant with calm abiding. Therefore, there is a difference between 'an awareness arisen from hearing' and 'a wisdom arisen from hearing'. 'A wisdom arisen from hearing' constitutes a mental factor that is both, 'an awareness arisen from hearing' *and* the mental factor of wisdom. For instance, the mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with 'a wisdom arisen from hearing' is *an awareness* arisen from hearing but not 'a *wisdom* arisen from hearing'.

Also, there is a difference between 'an awareness arisen from contemplation' and 'a wisdom arisen from contemplation'; 'a wisdom arisen from contemplation' constitutes a mental factor that is both, 'an awareness arisen from contemplation' *and* the mental factor of wisdom.

Likewise, there is a difference between '*an awareness* arisen from meditation' and '*a wisdom* arisen from meditation' because '*a wisdom* arisen from meditation' constitutes a mental factor that is both, an awareness arisen from meditation and the mental factor of wisdom.

Additionally, the scriptures mention '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' which is different from '*an awareness* arisen from meditation'. '*An awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' refers to an awareness that is the union of calm abiding and special insight. However it is not listed as a fourth type of awareness, for it is an instance of and thus *subsumed* under '*an awareness* arisen from meditation'. It is an instance of '*an awareness* arisen from meditation' because whatever is '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' is necessarily '*an awareness* arisen from meditation'.

However, whatever is '*an awareness* arisen from meditation' is not necessarily '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation'. An example of '*an awareness* arisen from meditation' that is not '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' is the mental factor of calm abiding in the continuum of a practitioner who has not yet cultivated the meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight. Therefore, the cultivation of '*an awareness* arisen from meditation' precedes the cultivation of '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation', for (as is explained below) the cultivation of calm abiding must precede the cultivation of the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Also, as before, there is difference between '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' and '*a wisdom mainly* arisen from meditation', for '*an awareness mainly* arisen from meditation' refers to any awareness that is a union of calm abiding and special insight while '*a wisdom mainly* arisen from meditation' refers to the mental factor of wisdom that is a union of calm abiding and special insight.

<b>An awareness arisen from hearing</b>	→ <b>a correctly assuming consciousness</b>
<b>An awareness arisen from contemplation</b>	→ <b>an inferential cognizer</b>
<b>An awareness arisen from meditation</b>	→ <b>an awareness that is concomitant with the mental factor of calm abiding, or the mental factor of calm abiding itself</b>
<b>An awareness <i>mainly</i> arisen from meditation</b>	→ <b>an awareness that is a union of calm abiding and special insight</b>

<b>Wisdom arisen from hearing</b>	→ <b>the mental factor of wisdom that is a correctly assuming consciousness</b>
<b>Wisdom arisen from contemplation</b>	→ <b>the mental factor of wisdom that is an inferential cognizer</b>
<b>Wisdom arisen from meditation</b>	→ <b>the mental factor of wisdom that is concomitant with the mental factor of calm abiding</b>
<b>Wisdom <i>mainly</i> arisen from meditation</b>	→ <b>the mental factor of wisdom that is a union of calm abiding and special insight</b>

With regard to the three types of wisdom focusing on emptiness, 'the wisdom arisen from hearing that focuses on emptiness' refers to: the mental factor of wisdom that is a correctly assuming consciousness apprehending emptiness. 'The wisdom arisen from contemplation that focuses on emptiness' refers to: the mental factor of wisdom that is an inferential cognizer realizing emptiness. And 'the wisdom arisen

from meditation that focuses on emptiness' refers to: the mental factor of wisdom that is concomitant with calm abiding realizing emptiness.

Also, 'the wisdom *mainly* arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness' refers to the mental factor of wisdom that is a union of calm abiding and special insight realizing emptiness.

In order to fully comprehend the process of newly cultivating the 'the wisdom mainly arisen from meditation focusing on emptiness' and therefore the Mahayana path of preparation that is a union of calm abiding and special insight realizing emptiness, it may be helpful to give the following explanation. (Please note that this explanation is from the point of view of Bodhisattvas who entered the Mahayana path from the outset):

On the path of accumulation Bodhisattvas first cultivate the wisdom arisen from hearing that focuses on emptiness, i.e. a correctly assuming consciousness apprehending emptiness. Such cultivation is followed by developing the wisdom arisen from contemplation that focuses on emptiness, i.e. an inferential cognizer realizing emptiness (unless they cultivated those two types of awareness before they entered the path of accumulation). If they do not realize emptiness with an inferential cognizer *at the latest* on the path of accumulation they cannot move on to the next level. Mahayana practitioners attain such inferential realization of emptiness by reflecting on the various reasons that establish the lack of inherent/intrinsic existence.

Additionally, on the path of accumulation Bodhisattvas also cultivate a special meditative stabilization that is called 'a union of calm abiding and special insight', (unless they already cultivated such stabilization before they entered the path of accumulation). In order to *newly* cultivate this union practitioners take as the object of meditation a phenomenon that is not difficult to focus on, such as the image of the Buddha, for at this stage, practitioners would be unable to focus on a subtle phenomenon such as emptiness, subtle impermanence, and so forth while cultivating this meditative stabilization.

In turn, the attainment of such a union must be preceded by developing calm abiding. Etymologically, calm abiding refers to a mental stabilization *abiding* single-pointedly on an object, following the *calming* of distractions.

For the development of the mental stabilization of calm abiding, practitioners choose an object of focus that leads neither to excitement nor to mental laxity, such as the image of a Buddha or the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. By single-pointedly focusing on that object they progress through nine stages: (1) setting the mind, (2) continuous setting, (3) resetting, (4) close setting (5) disciplining, (6) pacifying, (7) thorough pacifying, (8) making one-pointed, and (9) setting in equipoise.

When meditators have reached the ninth state (*setting in equipoise*), they are able to focus effortlessly on an internal or imagined object without mental laxity or excitement for at least four hours.

However, this is not yet sufficient, because calm abiding is only attained when the ninth state is conjoined with physical and mental pliancy. Hence, practitioners continue with their single-pointed meditation until they first achieve mental pliancy. Such pliancy makes the mind serviceable by pacifying the detrimental states that cause the awareness to be heavy and inflexible, and prevent it from engaging in virtue at will. Thereafter, they achieve physical pliancy which makes the body serviceable and is a pacification of physical heaviness and inflexibility.

The attainment of calm abiding marks the attainment of 'the wisdom arisen from meditation', for calm abiding is concomitant with the mental factor of wisdom that is arisen from meditation.

After attaining calm abiding practitioners develop the union of calm abiding (meditative stabilization) and special insight (meditative analysis), so that special insight is generated based on or conjoined with calm abiding.

In order to develop such union, practitioners initially harmonize calm abiding and analytical meditation by alternating from one to the other, since too much concentration would disrupt the process of analysis, while too much analysis would reduce the factor of stability.

If during the cultivation of calm-abiding a practitioner focused, for instance, on the image of the Buddha, he now also focuses on the image of the Buddha as the object of the analytical meditation, analyzing the image's features, height, color, and so forth.

When, through introspection, practitioners notice during the analytical meditation that excitement is about to arise, they shift to meditative stabilization (calm abiding), alternating back to analysis when the mind has stabilized.

Through this process of repeatedly alternating between analytical and stabilizing meditation, meditators are eventually able to combine the mental factor of calm abiding with the mental factor of analytical wisdom. This means that calm-abiding and the analytical wisdom now operate in parallel at the same time, with equal power, one assisting the other. They have become concomitant mental factors, perceive the same object, and arise and cease at the same time. When analytical wisdom further induces a special mental and physical pliancy, imparting special stability and clarity to the analytical mind, practitioners attain 'a meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight' conceptually realizing the image of a Buddha. This enables them to gain a deep, clear, and intense perception, free from mental distraction and mental sinking.

The attainment of the mental stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight marks the attainment of the 'wisdom *mainly* arisen from meditation'. Please note that the 'mental stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight' constitutes the mental factor of calm abiding and 'the wisdom mainly arisen from meditation' the mental factor of special insight that is concomitant with the mental factor of calm abiding.

After the cultivation of this union practitioners then - instead of taking to mind the image of a Buddha - focus on emptiness. Through continuous familiarity they first cultivate calm abiding conceptually realizing emptiness (which marks the attainment of 'the wisdom arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness') and eventually the meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight conceptually realizing emptiness. The first moment of such a union conceptually realizing emptiness is attained when, while being absorbed in calm abiding, the bliss of mental and physical pliancy is induced by the power of analyzing emptiness with the mental factor of special insight. That moment also marks the first moment of 'the wisdom *mainly* arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness' and therefore of the Mahayana path of preparation.

Mahayana path of accumulation	Mahayana path of preparation
<p>Wisdom arisen from hearing focusing on emptiness</p> <p>Wisdom arisen from contemplation focusing on emptiness</p> <p>Wisdom arisen from meditation focusing e.g. on the image of a Buddha</p> <p>Wisdom mainly arisen from meditation focusing e.g. on the image of a Buddha</p> <p>Wisdom arisen from meditation focusing on emptiness</p>	<p>Wisdom mainly arisen from meditation focusing on emptiness</p>

Now one may wonder what the difference is between the three, (1) the wisdom arisen from hearing that focuses on emptiness, (2) the wisdom arisen from contemplation that focuses on emptiness, and (3) the wisdom mainly arisen from meditation that focuses on emptiness, *with regard to dualistic appearance*. The difference is that in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation, who entered the Mahayana path from the outset, the two, (1) the wisdom arisen from hearing and (2) the wisdom arisen from contemplation perceive emptiness conjoined with coarse dualistic appearance of the object emptiness and the object-possessor, the wisdom itself. This means that to these consciousnesses the object emptiness and the wisdom appear as if unrelated and distant from one another. On the other hand, (3) the wisdom mainly arisen from meditation conceptually realizes emptiness conjoined with only subtle dualistic appearance [of object and object-possessor], having overcome the coarse dualistic appearance that characterizes the former two types of awareness. However, since the

awareness arisen from meditation on the Mahayana path of preparation still possesses subtle dualistic appearance, emptiness and the wisdom arisen from meditation are merely on the brink of appearing like water being poured into water.

It is only when one reaches the Mahayana path of seeing and realizes emptiness directly and non-conceptually that one overcomes even the subtlest dualistic appearance of the object emptiness and the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness. At that time emptiness and the meditative equipoise appear like water being poured into water.

Gyalsab je says in his **Ornament of the Essence**:

If someone asks, "what is the difference between the three types of wisdom focusing on emptiness?" [The reply is:] when a wisdom arisen from hearing or contemplation focuses on emptiness - [with emptiness being] a mere negation of elaborations of true existence - even though the [meaning] generality of the object [emptiness] appears well, owing to very coarse dualistic appearance of the object [emptiness] and the object-possessor [the wisdom], [object and object-possessor] appear as though unrelated.

However, when a wisdom [mainly] arisen from meditation focuses on [emptiness], although there is dualistic appearance, having overcome the coarse dualistic appearance of the former two [types of wisdom], it seems as if one has penetrated the object [emptiness]. Also, owing to [emptiness and the wisdom mainly arisen from meditation] being on the brink of appearing like water being poured into water, the meaning-generality [of emptiness] appears in such a manner that it is said that 'dharmata [i.e. emptiness] appears clearly'. However, [that type of clear appearance] is not the clear appearance that is free from conceptuality.

Furthermore, when one is able to induce the bliss of mental and physical pliancy through the power of correctly analyzing the meaning of emptiness, while being absorbed in calm abiding, one attains the fully qualified special insight that focuses on emptiness, and hence one is said 'to attain the union of [calm abiding and special insight]'. Yet one should know that a mere union of calm abiding and special insight [which does not realize emptiness] also manifests on the path of accumulation and [in the mental continuums] of some non-Buddhists.

Corresponding to the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation (heat, peak, etc.), there are also four types of meditative stabilizations that are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness. They also slightly differ in the strength of the subtle dualistic appearance. Even though the meditative stabilizations that are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness of the heat and peak levels have overcome coarse dualistic appearance, Bodhisattvas on these two levels can still discern subtle dualistic appearance.

However, once practitioners reach the forbearance level of the path of preparation they can no longer discern such subtle dualistic appearance.

Asanga says in his **Shravaka-bhumi**:

*It seems as though dualistic appearance subsided but it did not subside.*

Gyalsab je says in the **Ornament of the Essence**:

When one initially generates such a union of calm abiding and special insight realizing emptiness, one is said to have 'generated the heat level of the path of preparation'.

At that time, while absorbed [in the realization of emptiness] one is able to ascertain dualistic appearance through the force of one's experience. However, since one is not able to ascertain such [dualistic appearance] when one attains the forbearance level, and so forth, [Asanga] says in the **Shravaka-bhumi**, "it seems as though dualistic appearance has subsided but it did not subside".

## 5. The meaning of the individual categories (of the Mahayana path of preparation)

The meaning of the individual categories (i.e. of the four levels of heat, peak, forbearance, and supreme Dharma) is set forth by way of describing the difference between the four levels.

- Someone asserts that the four levels differ with respect to the strength of the clear appearance of emptiness. This means that even though emptiness clearly appears to the four levels' awarenesses arisen from meditation that realize emptiness, that clear appearance enhances on each level.

Therefore, on the **heat** level the clear appearance of the emptiness of the objects of perception is weak, (2) on the **peak** level the clear appearance of the emptiness of objects of perception is middling, (3) on the **forbearance** level the clear appearance of the emptiness of objects of perception is great, and (4) on the **supreme Dharma** level the clear appearance of the emptiness of perceivers is complete.

According to our own system this is not correct because each of the four levels' awarenesses that are single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness are the same with regard to being absorbed into the lack of true existence of both objects of perception and perceivers, and with regard to having clear appearance of the meaning-generality of emptiness and thus of emptiness itself. In other words, the four levels are the same in conceptually realizing the emptiness of phenomena and in having clear appearance of emptiness.

Gyalsab je says in the *Ornament of the Essence*:

It is very difficult to differentiate between the four levels of the path of preparation by way of [positing] them to have weak, middling, and great clear appearance of the lack of inherent existence of objects of perception, and having complete clear appearance of the lack of inherent existence of perceivers [respectively]. The reason is that at the time of absorption [into emptiness, the four levels] do not differ with regard to simultaneously withdrawing objects of perception and perceivers, being absorbed into the lack of inherent existence, and having clear appearance of the meaning-generality of emptiness.

Our own system asserts the difference between the four levels to be from the point of view of the capacity to eliminate obstructions.

However, this does not mean that Bodhisattvas on the path of preparation are able to irreversibly eliminate any of the afflictive or cognitive obstructions yet, for they are able to do so only once they directly realize emptiness, i.e. once they attain the Mahayana path of seeing. Instead, it means that the four levels differ with regard to the type of misperception they are able to undermine (or weaken) as a result of their difference in familiarity with emptiness.

Maitreya says in his *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* (Skt.: *Mahayanasutraalamkara*, Tib.: *mdo sde rgyan*):

*At that time, the distractions of objects of perception will be eliminated*

(and:)

*In this way, subsequent to that, the distractions to the perceiver will be eliminated.*

The meaning of these two quotes is that on the two levels of **heat** and **peak** Bodhisattvas' capacity to eliminate manifest intellectually acquired awarenesses grasping at the true existence of objects of perception increases. Then while they are absorbed in the realization of emptiness on the **forbearance** level of the path of preparation Bodhisattvas are able to decrease the coarse strength of manifest innate awarenesses grasping at the true existence of objects of perception. During the subsequent attainment period of the **forbearance** level (after having arisen from the absorption into emptiness) they are able to understand objects of perception to be unreal like a magician's illusion. Thereafter, on the **supreme Dharma** level through the power of familiarity, they are also able to understand perceivers to be unreal like a magician's illusion.

The reason for this sequence is that there are differences between awarenesses adhering to truly existent *objects of perception* and awarenesses adhering to truly existent *perceivers* in terms of how easy or difficult it is to eliminate them. This is explained in detail below.

Gyalsab je also says in the *Ornament of the Essence*:

Therefore, at the time of the first two levels [**heat** and **peak**] the capacity to eliminate [awarenesses] grasping at the true existence of objects of perception becomes more and more outstanding. When the forbearance level of the path of preparation is generated [- while being absorbed in the realization of emptiness-] the coarse strength of manifest innate [awarenesses] grasping at the true existence of objects of perception also decreases. After having arisen from the absorption into emptiness, the generality of objects of perception appearing like a reflection in a mirror appears well.

When the **supreme Dharma** level is generated, perceivers also appear that way through the power of familiarity. Such sequence unfolds because of how easy or difficult it is to eliminate [awarenesses] adhering to truly existent objects of perception and [awarenesses adhering to truly existent] perceivers. [Maitreya] says in the **Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras** (Skt.: **Mahayanasutraalamkara**, Tib.: **mdo sde rgyan**), "At that time, the distractions of objects of perception will be eliminated," and "In this way, subsequent to that, the distractions to the perceiver will be eliminated." Hence, the four levels of the path of preparation differ on account of eliminating [obstructions]. The claim that, "[the four levels differ] on account of having or not having clear appearance of exalted wisdom" is a claim that is clearly bereft of anything to say.

## 6. The type of awareness (that constitutes the path of preparation that is a union of calm abiding and special insight realizing emptiness)

This section examines the type of awareness that constitutes a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset.

- Someone asserts that a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is non-conceptual with regard to emptiness, i.e. it directly realizes emptiness.

The response from our own system to this assertion is that it is not correct because from the perspective of a mundane person emptiness is a hidden phenomenon and therefore a mundane person is not able to realize emptiness directly. A Bodhisattva on the path of preparation who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is a mundane person, for he has not yet entered the supermundane Mahayana path of seeing.

Also, if the Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset were non-conceptual with regard to emptiness, the following question would arise: is that mind a mistaken awareness with regard to emptiness or a non-mistaken awareness?

If one were to say that it is a mistaken awareness with regard to emptiness then it would follow that it does not realize emptiness because it is a non-conceptual *wrong* consciousness. It would follow that it is a non-conceptual wrong consciousness because it would be a mind that is both non-conceptual and mistaken with regard to emptiness.

Please note that there is a difference between a *mistaken* consciousness and a *wrong* consciousness. A mistaken consciousness is an awareness that is mistaken with respect to its appearing object whereas a wrong consciousness is an awareness that is mistaken with respect to its object of engagement. Therefore, whatever is a mistaken consciousness is not necessarily a wrong consciousness.

For instance, all conceptual consciousnesses are mistaken awarenesses. Yet they are not necessarily wrong consciousnesses. A conceptual consciousness apprehending a car, for example, is not a wrong consciousness because it is not mistaken with respect to its object of engagement, the car. It is not mistaken with respect to its object of engagement because its object of engagement, the car, exists. However, the conceptual consciousness apprehending the car is mistaken because it is mistaken with respect to its appearing object. It is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because conceptual consciousnesses can apprehend the car only by way of the appearance of the generic image (meaning generality) of the car, and because that generic image of the car appears to be the actual car while it is not the actual car. The generic image is not the actual car because it is merely a subjective representation of the car in that it encompasses what we *mean* when we say "car"; it serves as an intermediary object that allows the conceptual consciousness to get at the car.

Therefore, even though the generic image of the car is not the actual car, since to a conceptual consciousness apprehending the car the generic image of the car appears to *be* the actual car, the conceptual consciousness is a mistaken awareness.

But according to the Madhyamika Prasangika system not only conceptual consciousnesses, *all* ordinary awarenesses are mistaken. They are mistaken because their objects appear to exist truly/intrinsically (while of course it is impossible for them to exist that way). Hence, an eye consciousness apprehending a

sunset, for instance, is a mistaken consciousness because it is mistaken with respect to its appearing object. It is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because the sunset appears to exist truly/intrinsically. However, it is not a wrong consciousness since its object of engagement, the sunset, exists.

Therefore, even though our ordinary awarenesses can correctly perceive the different phenomena of the world around us they are nonetheless mistaken with respect to the ultimate nature of these phenomena, their lack of true existence.

The only non-mistaken awareness in the continuum of sentient beings is the awareness that directly realizes emptiness, i.e. the yogic direct perceiver that realizes the lack of true existence of all phenomena. It is not mistaken with regard to the appearance of the generic image of emptiness because it realizes emptiness *directly* without having to rely on the appearance of a generic image of emptiness. Also, it is not mistaken with regard to the appearance of true existence because all phenomena appear to it to be *empty* of true existence.

However, if the Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset were non-conceptual *and* mistaken, it could only be mistaken with regard to emptiness. It could only be mistaken with regard to emptiness because as a direct perceiver realizing emptiness it can neither be mistaken with regard to the appearance of a generic image nor with regard to the appearance of true existence.

In case it were mistaken with regard to emptiness, it would be mistaken with regard to its object of engagement and thus be a wrong consciousness.

If in response to the above mentioned question (- whether the Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is a mistaken awareness with regard to emptiness or a non-mistaken awareness -) one were to say that it is a non-mistaken awareness, then it would absurdly follow that it is an awareness that is a direct antidote to the objects of elimination of the path of seeing and irreversibly eliminates these objects of elimination because it is a non-conceptual and non-mistaken awareness with regard to emptiness (and because these objects of elimination have not yet been previously eliminated). However, it is not such a direct antidote, because it is not a path of seeing but a path of preparation.

Gyaltsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

It is not reasonable to assert this path of preparation absorbed [into emptiness] to be a non-conceptual [consciousness] with regard to emptiness, which apprehends a sound [-generality] and a meaning [-generality] as suitable to be mixed because (i) for a mundane person emptiness is hidden and because (ii) such a non-conceptual consciousness cannot possibly comprehend a hidden [phenomenon].

If it were mistaken with regard to dharmata it would not be correct [to assert] that it clears away manifest superimpositions because it would be a non-conceptual wrong consciousness. If it were non-mistaken it follows that even the seeds of the object of elimination of the path of seeing would be eliminated [by it], because it would be an awareness that is free from conceptuality and non-mistaken with regard to dharmata.

- Someone asserts that a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is an inferential cognizer that is the result of reflecting on correct reasons such as:

"The subject sprout is empty of being truly existent because it is empty of being truly existent one and truly existent many."

According to our own system, asserting such means that one does not understand the difference between the three types of wisdom (wisdom arisen from hearing, wisdom arisen from contemplation, and wisdom arisen from meditation). This is because whatever is an inferential cognizer is necessarily an awareness arisen from contemplation whereas a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is an awareness arisen from meditation.

Gyalsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

Someone who does not know the difference between the three [types of] wisdom asserts that [that type of path of preparation] is an inferential cognizer that relies on the 'free-from-one-and-many-reason'.

Therefore, our own system asserts that a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset is a subsequent cognizer. It is a subsequent cognizer because it is a conceptual knower that realizes emptiness through the power of having previously realized emptiness (with an inferential cognizer).

Gyalsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

Therefore, such an absorbed path of preparation, having become a wisdom arisen from meditation through the power of having familiarized with the continuum of a subsequent cognizer, it is of the nature of analysis to which the meaning generality of emptiness clearly appears.

- Someone asserts that emptiness does not appear clearly to a Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva who entered the Mahayana path from the outset because such a path of preparation is a conceptual consciousness. This is a correct reason because whatever is a conceptual consciousness cannot have clear appearance of emptiness, for Dharmakirti says in his ***Pramanavartika***:

*[To an awareness that] depends on a conceptual consciousness*

*The meaning does not appear clearly.*

According to our own system, this is not the meaning of the quote from the ***Pramanavartika*** because it is explained in the ***Ornament of the Essence*** that to that type of Mahayana path of preparation single-pointedly absorbed into emptiness both emptiness and the generic image of emptiness appear clearly. If they both appear clearly they necessarily both appear clearly as if mixed into one. Hence, the meaning of the quote from the ***Pramanavartika*** is that emptiness does not appear as clearly to a conceptual mind apprehending emptiness as it does to a non-conceptual mind apprehending emptiness.

### **An auxiliary presentation of conceptions of true existence**

Having set forth the six subtopics of the Mahayana path of preparation next follows an auxiliary presentation of conceptions of true existence that are explicitly indicated during the ***Ornament's*** presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation. These conceptions can be categorized into two types of conceptions which in turn can be further categorized into four types.

It is essential to understand these four types of conceptions since they are consecutively undermined by the meditative stabilizations absorbed into emptiness on the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation. As mentioned above, the difference between the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation is from the point of view of the capacity to eliminate obstructions. This means that the four levels (i.e. their meditative stabilizations absorbed into emptiness) differ with regard to which of the four types of misconception they are able to undermine (or weaken) as a result of their familiarity with meditating on emptiness.

Conceptions of true existence refer to conceptual consciousnesses that misperceive true existence. The conceptions of true existence that are explicitly indicated during the ***Ornament's*** presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation can be categorized into:

1. Conceptions of objects of perception (Tib.: *gzung rtog*)
2. Conceptions of perceivers (Tib.: *'dzin rtog*)

These two types of conceptions are the same in adhering to true/inherent existence but they differ with regard to the bases of their misperception, i.e. the phenomena which they perceive to exist truly/inherently.

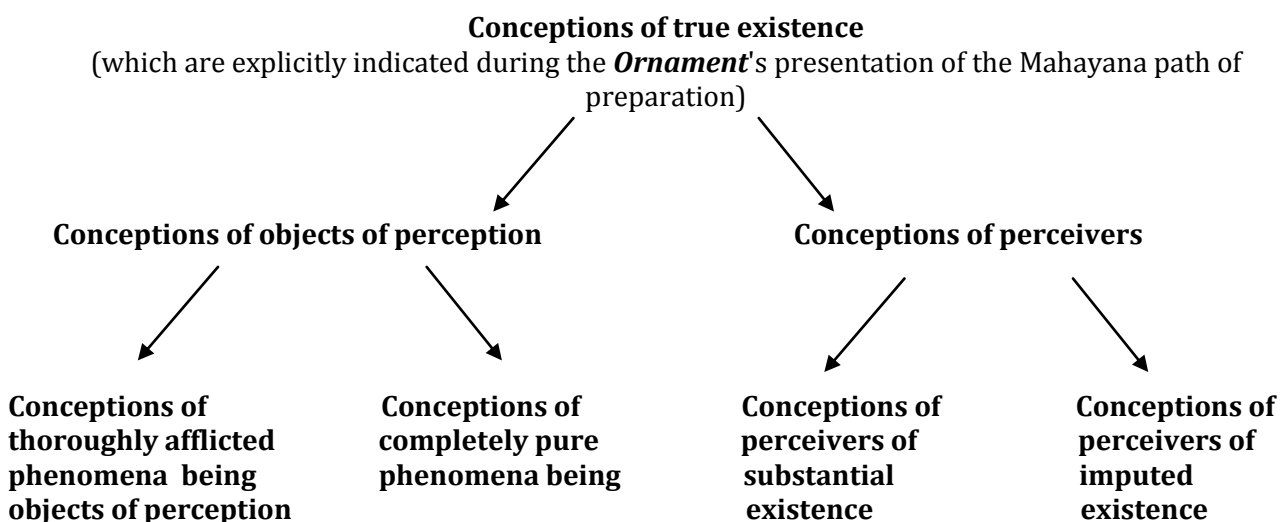
'Conceptions of objects of perception' apprehend truly existent objects of experience and 'conceptions of perceivers' apprehend truly existent experiencers. Please note that here 'perceivers' and 'experiencers' have the same meaning; they both refer either to awarenesses or to living beings, while 'objects of perception' or 'objects of experience' both refer to the *objects* of awarenesses or living beings. Therefore, the bases of misperception (i.e. the phenomena they perceive to exist truly/inherently) of 'conceptions of objects of perceptions' are objects of experience and the bases of misperception of 'conception of perceivers' are experiencers.

Furthermore, conceptions of objects of perception can be categorized into: (1) conceptions of thoroughly afflicted phenomena being objects of perception and (2) conceptions of pure phenomena being objects of perception.

Likewise, conceptions of perceivers can be categorized into (1) conceptions of perceivers of substantial existence and (2) conceptions of perceivers of imputed existence.

Thus, the four types of conceptions are:

1. Conceptions of thoroughly afflicted phenomena being objects of perception (Tib.: *kun nas nyon mongs gzung rtog*). They refer to conceptual consciousnesses which focus on thoroughly afflicted phenomena and apprehend them to be truly existent objects of experience (Tib.: *kun nas nyon mongs phyogs kyi bden pa la dmigs nas longs spyad byar bden par 'dzin pa'i zhen rig*)
2. Conceptions of pure phenomena being objects of perception. (Tib.: *rnam byang gzung rtog*) They refer to conceptual consciousnesses which focus on completely pure phenomena and apprehend them to be truly existent objects of experience (Tib.: *rnam byang phyogs kyi bden pa longs spyad byar bden par 'dzin pa'i zhen rig*)
3. Conceptions of perceivers of substantial existence (Tib.: *rdzas 'dzin rtog pa*) They refer to conceptual consciousnesses which focus on perceivers of substantial existence and apprehend them to be truly existent experiencers (Tib.: *rdas 'dzin la dmigs nas longs spyod byed du bden par 'dzin pa'i zhen rig*)
4. Conceptions of perceivers of imputed existence (Tib.: *btags 'dzin rtog pa*). They refer to conceptual consciousnesses which focus on perceivers of imputed existence and apprehend them to be truly existent experiencers (Tib.: *btags 'dzin la dmigs nas longs spyod byed du bden par 'dzin pa'i zhen rig*)



As before, even though the four types of misconceptions are the same in apprehending true/intrinsic existence they differ with regard to the bases of their misperception, i.e. the phenomena which they perceive to exist truly/intrinsically.

This means that the first two types of misconceptions not only apprehend truly existent objects of experience while the latter two types truly existent experiencers. Instead, the first type apprehend thoroughly afflicted phenomena to be truly existent objects of experience, the second type apprehend

completely pure phenomena to be truly existent object of experience, the third type apprehend perceivers of substantial existence to be truly existent experiencers while the fourth type apprehend perceivers of imputed existence to be truly existent experiencers.

Therefore, the bases of the first type of misconceptions are: thoroughly afflicted phenomena being objects of experience.

The bases of the second type of misconceptions are: completely pure phenomena being objects of experience.

The bases of the third misconception are: perceivers of substantial existence being experiencers.

And the bases of the fourth misconception are: perceivers of imputed existence being experiencers.

From the point of view of the Madhyamika Prasangika, the four types of misconceptions are afflictive obstructions which Bodhisattvas irreversibly eliminate while they progress through the first eight Bodhisattva bhumis/grounds (with the Mahayana path of seeing constituting the first bhumi).

Even though on the Mahayana path of preparation the 'meditative stabilizations, which are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' are unable to *eliminate* the four types of misconceptions, they are able to *undermine* them. The undermining of those conceptions in turn enables their complete removal by the yogic direct perceivers realizing emptiness on the path of seeing and the path of meditation.

Furthermore, out of the four types of misconceptions, the first is easier to undermine than the second, the second is easier to undermine than the third, and so forth.

Hence, the 'meditative stabilizations which are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' on the **heat** level of the path of preparation are able to undermine the first type of misconceptions but not the second, third, and fourth. The 'meditative stabilizations which are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' on the **peak** level are able to undermine the second type but not the third and fourth. The 'meditative stabilizations which are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' on the **forbearance** level are able to undermine the third type but not the fourth. And the 'meditative stabilization which are a union of calm abiding and special insight, conceptually realizing emptiness' on the **supreme Dharma** level are able to undermine the fourth.

The reason for these different abilities is that the four levels differ regarding the familiarity with emptiness - on the heat level Bodhisattvas are less familiar with emptiness than on the peak level, on the peak level less familiar than on the forbearance level, etc.; their familiarity with emptiness enhancing on each level.

Moreover, the reason for the first type of misconceptions being easier to undermine than the second, the second easier to undermine than the third, etc. is as follows:

As mentioned above, the first two types of misconceptions apprehend the true existence of objects of experience, whereas the latter two apprehend the true existence of experiencers. In this context, experiencers mainly refer to awarenesses or living beings, and objects of experience to the objects of these awarenesses or living beings.

Since it is easier to understand objects of experience than to understand the experiencers, i.e. the awarenesses/living beings, themselves, it is also easier to realize the *lack true existence* of objects of experience than to realize the *lack of true existence* of the experiencers or awarenesses/living beings themselves. Therefore, it is also easier to undermine misconceptions apprehending objects of experience to be truly existent (the two former types of misconceptions) than to undermine conceptions apprehending the true existence of experiencers (the two latter types of misconceptions).

Similarly, it is easier to realize that thoroughly afflicted phenomena are *empty* of being truly existent objects of experience than to realize that completely pure phenomena are *empty* of being truly existent objects of experience. Examples of thoroughly afflicted phenomena are the five aggregates of an ordinary person. They are thoroughly afflicted because they are the result of afflictions and contaminated karma. Examples of completely pure phenomena are the five aggregates of a Buddha, which are free from all faults and impurities. Since practitioners consider the five aggregates of an ordinary person to be phenomena that need to be overcome and the five aggregates of a Buddha phenomena to be attained, it is easier to realize the *lack of true existence* of the five aggregates of an ordinary person than to realize the

*lack of true existence* of the five aggregates of a Buddha. Likewise, it is also easier to realize that the five aggregates of an ordinary person are *empty* of being truly existent objects of experience than to realize that the five aggregates of a Buddha are *empty* of being truly existent objects of experience. Hence it is easier to undermine misconceptions which apprehend thoroughly afflicted phenomena to be truly existent objects of experience than to undermine misconceptions which apprehend completely pure phenomena to be truly existent object of experience.

Regarding the two latter types of conception (which both apprehend truly existent experiencers) it is easier to undermine misconceptions which apprehend perceivers of substantial existence to be truly existent experiencers than to undermine misconceptions which apprehend perceivers of imputed existence to be truly existent experiencers. This is because it is easier to realize that perceivers of substantial existence are *empty* of being truly existent experiencers than to realize that perceivers of imputed existence are *empty* of being truly existent experiencers.

Regarding the meaning of perceivers of substantial existence and perceivers of imputed existence, according to the Madhyamika Prasangika tenet School, all phenomena are empty of true/inherent existence and are instead merely imputed or merely 'imputedly existent'. The opposite of being imputedly existent is to be substantially existent. Therefore, since whatever exists is imputedly existent there is nothing that is substantially existent. In fact, being substantially existent is the object of negation of emptiness, and thus equivalent to being truly/inherently existent.

Examples of perceivers of substantial existence are awarenesses perceiving a truly/substantially existent self, while examples of perceivers of imputed existence are awarenesses realizing the self to be merely imputed on the basis of the five aggregates. Since awarenesses perceiving a truly/substantially existent self are afflictive obstructions and thus need to be removed, whereas awarenesses realizing that the self is merely imputed are awarenesses to be cultivated and deepened, it is easier for Buddhist practitioners to realize the *lack of true existence* of awarenesses perceiving a truly/substantially existent self than to realize the *lack of true existence* of awarenesses realizing that the self is merely imputed. Likewise, it is also easier to realize that awarenesses perceiving a truly/substantially existent self are *empty* of being truly existent experiencers, than to realize that awarenesses realizing that the self is merely imputed are *empty* of being truly existent experiencers.

Therefore, it is easier to undermine misconceptions which apprehend perceivers of substantial existence to be truly existent experiencers than to undermine misconceptions which apprehend perceivers of imputed existence to be truly existent experiencers.

This completes the auxiliary presentation of the four misconceptions.

Regarding the actual root text (i.e. Maitreya's **Ornament**), as mentioned above, two verses set forth the Mahayana path of preparation by way of briefly presenting the five characteristics by which the Mahayana path of preparation is superior to the Hinayana path of preparation while ten verses provide an extensive description of these characteristics:

### **The Ornament's brief presentation of the Mahayana path of preparation:**

*Just as the focus and the aspect  
And the cause and the tutor  
A protecting Bodhisattva's  
Embodiment of heat, and so forth.[26]*

*Dependent on being associated with four conceptual consciousnesses,  
The small, middling, and great,  
Are superior to those of  
Hearers and Rhinoceros-like ones.[27]*

The meaning of the two verses is:

**A protecting Bodhisattva's small, middling, and great heat, peak, and so forth are superior** to the Hinayana path of preparation of **Hearers and Rhinoceros-like Solitary Realizers** because they are superior with regard to being **dependent on being associated with** the elimination of the **four conceptual consciousnesses just as** they are superior with regard to **the focus, the aspect, the cause, and the tutor**.

The five characteristics by which the Mahayana path of preparation is superior to the Hinayana path of preparation are:

- (1) Focus
- (2) Aspect
- (3) Cause
- (4) Tutor
- (5) Mode of association

But there is another way to interpret these two verses, which is mentioned in Arya Vimuktisena's commentary on the **Ornament**. According to the other interpretation, the second line of the above cited second verse of the **Ornament** ("the small, the middling, and the great") presents a sixth characteristic of the Mahayana path of preparation, namely the characteristic of the three subdivisions of each of the four levels of the Mahayana path of preparation, i.e. small, middling, and great.

Hence, the meaning of the two verses according to the second interpretation is:

**A protecting Bodhisattva's heat, peak, etc. are superior to the path of preparation of Hearers and Rhinoceros-like Solitary Realizers because they are superior with regard to possessing the three subdivisions of small, middling, and great, and with regard to being dependent on being associated with the elimination of the four conceptual consciousnesses just as they are superior with regard to the focus, the aspect, the cause, and the tutor.**